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ABSTRACT

Both the current concern over student reading achievement and the recognition that the teacher is the key to excellence in reading instruction indicate the necessity for school-based teacher-training programs. This paper discusses a staff-development program in Palm Beach County, Florida, and includes an outline of the necessary teacher competencies, details of problems encountered (concerning evaluation methods, type of training program, assessment of needs, and released time), and guidelines for school centers to preparing and implementing school-based staff development programs. A flow-chart for program development and a diagram of inservice objectives are included. (JM)

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TEACHER EDUCATION IN READING AT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL

In all teacher education programs, at both the college and school district levels, there are some basic assumptions held. The first one is that the quality of a teacher's professional preparation determines whether that teacher will be a successful teacher. The second one is that regardless of the quality of the preservice programs provided for teachers, such programs are inadequate in scope and time and insufficient to maintain the teacher year after year on the job. The third assumption is that a teacher's professional preparation should rightfully consist of a continuous program of inservice instruction as well as preservice or graduate course work (Moburg, 1972).

Three other factors are also influencing school districts to put a major planning emphasis and budgetary dollars into extensive staff development programs. The public school systems, especially in Florida where an entire county is a single school district, are big businesses with millions of dollars in their annual operating budgets. There is an increasing tendency to treat school district problems as big business would. Industry

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has learned that efficient productivity depends on its employees and that continuous updating of skills and techniques are necessary (Dorman, 1976).

There is also a large body of evidence that preservice teacher programs have been woefully inadequate in the past. Roeder (1973) made a three-year study (1970 - 1973) of 940 institutions in the United States that offered an accredited elementary , secondary or junior high school teacher education program which graduated students with state certification. In the elementary programs 10% of the institutions had no requirement for courses in reading instruction. Only 10% required trainees to complete more than 3 hours of reading courses. Obviously reading instruction is one of the key tasks an elementary teacher performs. Although there has been concerted effort to improve this situation recently, the majority of teachers in public schools today will not benefit from reform in teacher training institutions since they were trained before 1970.

In 1970, a government report stated that masses of American students were leaving public schools unable to function effectively because of reading deficiencies. This awareness has caused school personnel, community leaders and state and federal agencies to designate improvement in reading instruction as a very high priority item. The School Board of Palm Beach County has named improvement in reading achievement as either the number one or number two goal of the school system for the past three years. If the teacher is the key to excellence in reading instruction, as most of the reading research indicates, than it is understandable that staff development at the school district level has the importance it has.

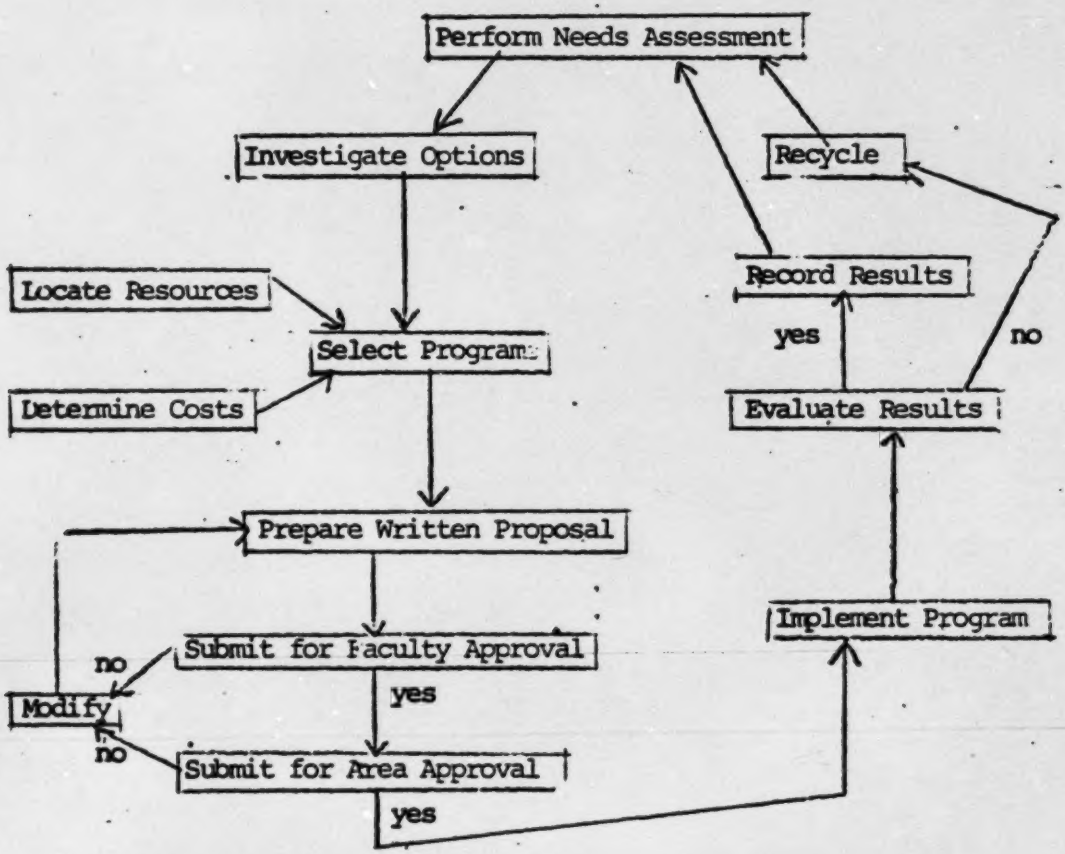
The school center probably is the most effective place to conduct teacher training activities. It has the needed number and variety of students. It has the necessary principal and community contact for planning and implementing changes in teaching strategies and programs and it provides for the interaction of all these forces in a realistic setting (Howe, 1968).

In Palm Beach County, staff development is coordinated in a separate department whose function is to assist, coordinate and help evaluate the school center program . Approximately $500,000 was allocated in the 1976 school year for staff development which represents $6.59 allocated for each pupil in the district. Florida Statutes and the State Board of Education Regulations have mandated that each school district in Florida adopt a master plan for all instructional personnel designed to assist each member to maintain current competence in the field or fields to which the member is assigned.These plans are formulated in cooperation with the Department of Education and when adopted are filed with the Commissioner of Education. Each school center is alloted $2.00 of this total for school-based programs. The remainder of the sum is used by administrative areas and central office personnel for county-wide or leadership training programs.

The staff development program in each school must reflect the same concerns as the Master Plan for the county and the priorities set by the School Board, but is developed individually after an identification of needs and as part of the annual Program, Planning Budgeting and Evaluation System in use. The flow chart illustrates the steps each school takes in

developing its plan.

FLOWCHART FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL-BASED TEACHER TRAINING



Each component is written with behavioral objectives to which are matched activities and evaluation procedures.

The school centers have a number of options available to them:

1) staff meetings
2) exchange visits
3) institutes,
4) minicourses
5) school center courses
6) demonstrations

7) guided field trips
8) organized group study
9) microteaching
10) lectures by consultants
11) individualized instruction
12) production of materials
13) self-instruction
14) peer tutoring

Programs are held before or after school, on Saturdays, on teacher-planning days, in the evenings, during the summer, with released time from the use of substitutes and with released time by doubling student load for short periods of time.

The content of the programs designed to improve reading instruction have been clearly defined for schools in Florida since the Legislature mandated diagnostic-prescriptive instruction for all students in basic skills in grades kindergarten through adulthood. These competencies have been delineated as necessary to provide such instruction in reading:

0.0 The competent teacher of reading should demonstrate the ability to diagnose the reading status of individual students, prescribe appropriate reading methods and materials to improve reading performance, evaluate attainment of reading skills and build reading fluency so that reading is used by students independently for recreation and to obtain information.

1.0 The teacher must possess a thorough knowledge of :

1.1 Pre-reading skills

1.2 Decoding skills

1.3 Comprehension skills

1.4 Reference and study skills

2.0 The teacher must demonstrate proficiency in evaluating reading skills through the use of:

- 2.1 criterion-based measures
- 2.2 analysis of oral reading
- 2.3 analysis of spelling errors
- 2.4 other evaluation techniques when necessary

3.0 The teacher must be skillful in administering:

- 3.1 informal diagnostic procedures
- 3.2 formal diagnostic procedures

4.0 The teacher will assist students in building reading fluency

5.0 The teacher will demonstrate skill in recognizing individual differences through understanding:

- 5.1 appropriate use and limitations of measures of learning potential
- 5.2 influence of background experiences in learning
- 5.3 dialectical differences

6.0 The teacher must be able to use prescriptive teaching in:

- 6.1 selecting and sequencing skill objectives to meet individual needs
- 6.2 understanding and applying various approaches and teaching methods
- 6.3 evaluating reading materials in terms of skill development, content and appropriateness to the learner
- 6.4 selecting reading materials for learning modalities and rate

6.5 using a variety of grouping patterns to provide for individual skills, interests and social needs

6.6 identifying the need for and organizing and managing groups of various sizes

6.7 using or adapting commercial and teacher/pupil made materials to student needs

However a number of problems arise even with such a well-designed plan. One of the major problems deals with the evaluation of the results of teacher training activities. Three methods are currently in use: an assessment of the participants' personal growth, an assessment of the participants' achievement and an assessment of the students' achievement (Dorman, 1976). The most desirable, because it measures the very goal we are seeking, is an increase in student achievement. There is evidence that the concerted attack on reading achievement in Palm Beach County is succeeding, but it is almost impossible to decide what portion of this improvement can be attributed to the inservice program in an individual school. It is usual in most school center programs to simply measure whether or not the participants have completed the program itself . With such an unsophisticated evaluation procedure, it is possible for teachers to complete a component and have no actual increase in competency. There are a variety of devices available to help schools improve the effectiveness of their measurements: classroom observations, interviews, checklists, rating scales, analysis of student worksheets, anecdotal records, sample student products and

criterion-based student assessments (Moburg, 1972).

Another problem encountered by schools, is the delivery system for a teacher training program. The most commonly used remains the workshop conducted by a county or outside consultant. There is an increasing tendency to augment the lecture method with teacher involvement, but this is still in the minority. Harris and Bessent (1969) have designed a grid that can help schools accomplish their inservice objectives more effectively:

INSERVICE DESIGN GRID

	Objectives				
Activities	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Synthesis	Values
lecture	xxxxxxxxx				
illustrated lecture	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
demonstration	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
observation	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
interviewing	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
brainstorming	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
group discussion	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
buzz sessions	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
role-playing	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				
guided practice	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx				

There are always forces at work in a school center that can cause

problems. Any change requires more energy to be exerted than in maintaining the status quo. The difficulty of measuring accurately the results of a training program removes one of the most motivational of all techniques. Often there is no extrinsic reward for a teacher to expend time and energy in changing behavior. The simple desire for change is threatening to some teachers (Otto and Erickson, 1973). An increasing requirement for accountability from the school district administration, the parents in the community and the society may act as the motivational stick in the future.

Another problem is caused by the difficulty a school has assessing its true needs or sometimes recognizing its true needs. The standardized test scores given annually in the county clearly point out any student deficiencies at the individual, class, school or county level. However this does not prevent a school from concluding that materials or another organizational plan may be the problem. Increased skill in diagnostic-prescriptive teaching will hopefully lead to more accurate evaluation of needs.

Releasing the staff for activities is another major problem. The most expensive item, at approximately $30 per day, is the cost of a substitute teacher. It is clearly recognized that staff development activiare more favorably received, especially by the marginal teacher, when they occur during school time. In addition, the teacher feels that the school considers her of real inportance when an expenditure of such a nature is made. Because 30 teachers can receive training from an outside consultant at $150 a day, or $5 per teacher, it can be readily seen why this method, though less effective, is so commonly used.

The Florida Department of Education prepared a state of the art summary of research on materials and procedures for changing teacher behaviors in inservice education (DOE, 1974). The results of this study provide very clear guide lines for school centers in preparing and implementing school-based staff development programs. This study concludes that :

1) School settings are necessary to influence complex behavior changes in teachers.
2) Minicourses are highly successful in achieving specific skill objectives.
3) No medium of instruction is totally inappropriate.
4) Video and audio taping are effective to improve classroom management skills.
5) Observation systems are relatively ineffective in influencing teacher attitudes or pupil behavior.
6) School-based programs which are teacher planned and in which teachers help each other are more successful than programs led by college or consultant personnel.
7) Objectives that focus on changing teacher concepts or enlarging teacher knowledge are more successful than objectives that attempt to change teacher behavior, attitudes or values.
8) It is easier to change teacher behavior than student behavior.
9) Inservice involving the total school faculty and a general school effort are more successful than single shot efforts.

10) Finally, although self-initiated and self-directed training activities are seldom used, they are very successful in school-based programs.

In spite of the difficulties and problems that may arise and the still relatively naive level of programs being written, school-based teacher training is a successful device for improving teacher competency in reading instruction. Aside from the halo effect, such programs help to unify and motivate the entire faculty to work toward common goals. They can improve the reading program by increasing teacher awareness of reading skills. These programs can clarify problems and suggest solutions. They can lead to the introduction of new ideas and new procedures. They can improve accountability procedures, and finally, they involve parents and the community in increased public support for reading goals (Otto and Erickson, 1973).

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